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## CENSUS STATISTICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

A LATE article<sup>1</sup> by the Commissioner of Labor seems worthy of note as illustrating the unreliability of official statistics. From statistics of the Eleventh Census, Colonel Wright estimates the approximate number of persons unemployed during the census year as 1,139,672, or 5.01 per cent. of the total number engaged in remunerative occupations. He also estimates that in manufacturing and mechanical industries the nonemployment amounted to the equivalent of but 346,447 persons for twelve months. He says also :

It is the firm belief of the writer that the number of unemployed at the present time, or at any time since the advent of the régime of machinery, is not only not in excess of the number of unemployed under old systems of production, but is, in fact, less—a condition that, it is believed, has been shown beyond dispute.

The basis of these conclusions is the report of the last census as to nonemployment, regarding which Colonel Wright remarks :

Fortunately for the present discussion, we are able to draw from the Report on Population, part 2, Eleventh Census of the United States (1890), some very valuable information relating to the unemployed. Facts concerning the unemployed were asked for in the census of 1880, but the results were so incomplete and valueless that no attempt was made to tabulate them. Thus it was that in the reports of the Eleventh Census (1890) information of the character under consideration was for the first time in federal enumerations compiled and presented in connection with the statistics of occupations derived from answers made on the population schedules.

In using the figures relative to the unemployed, drawn from the census of 1890, it must be understood that they do not represent the number of persons who may have been unemployed at any one time, but simply the aggregate number of persons who were unemployed for different lengths of time and to a very considerable extent, probably at different times during the census year covering the twelve months from June 1, 1889, to May 31, 1890. . . .

Considering the results for the whole country, the total number of persons, without regard to sex, unemployed at their principal occupations during any portion of the census year was 3,523,730, being 15.50 per cent. of the total number (22,735,661) of persons ten years of age and over, engaged in gainful occupations in 1890. Of this total number of unemployed (3,523,730), 1,818,865, or 51.62 per cent. were unemployed from one to three months ;

<sup>1</sup> "The Relation of Product to Productive Capacity." By CARROLL D. WRIGHT, *The Forum*, February 1898.

1,368,418, or 38.83 per cent., were unemployed from four to six months, and 336,447, or 9.55 per cent., were unemployed from seven to twelve months.

Colonel Wright arrives at his conclusion as to the equivalent number unemployed for the entire year by assuming that the average number of months unemployed for all the persons reported for each period would be the mean in each case, and reducing the number of persons unemployed for the different periods to an equivalent of so many persons for one year.

Being advised that an attempt to obtain the same facts at the preceding census proved a failure, should we not look with some incredulity upon these alleged facts, which seem contrary to intelligent observations? General Walker remarks at the Ninth Census: "As assistant marshals are appointed under the American system, nice discriminations in respect to industrial relations can hardly be maintained in a sufficient proportion of cases to give value to the aggregate results."

The like is true for the Eleventh Census, perhaps in a higher degree. The inadequacy and inefficiency of our census enumeration are well known.<sup>1</sup> The value of the information obtained may perhaps be best judged by comparing the returns with common observation as to a few occupations, regarding which nearly everyone is fairly well informed. Below is the report as to nonemployment in five occupations, and also the total number of workers as reported in the tables of occupation :

	Total No. as shown in tables of occupations	Persons unemployed at their principal occupation during the census year			
		Total	1 to 3 mos.	4 to 6 mos.	7 to 12 mos.
Masons, brick and stone.....	158,918	68,355	27,824	33,463	7,068
Paper hangers .... .	12,369	3,452	1,550	1,525	377
Painters, glaziers, varnishers..	219,912	68,170	32,550	29,180	6,440
Plasterers .....	39,002	16,728	6,849	8,265	1,614
Plumbers and gasfitters.....	56,607	7,615	4,255	2,531	829

As to the second of these occupations, nearly everyone is aware that paper hanging is done almost exclusively at house-cleaning

<sup>1</sup> As a specimen of unreliable official figures, the tables of occupation show 723 females employed in the cigar and tobacco industry in Jersey City; the manufacturing returns show no females and but three children; the report of the New Jersey factory inspector shows 2500 females and 260 children employed in the single factory of Lorillard & Company; and the report on strikes and lockouts shows 1600 females, classed as pluggers, on a strike in this industry in this city during the year 1890.

time, covering not more than six months in the year, the principal part of the work being done during two or three months of the spring, and a smaller amount during a corresponding period in the fall. There are, of course, odd jobs at all times of the year, but not sufficient to employ more than a very small proportion of the workers.

It is true that many paper hangers find employment during the year at some other work, usually painting, but the question asked was as to principal occupation. According to the census returns, of the 12,369 paper hangers reported, but 3452 were unemployed at their principal occupation more than a month during the census year, and less than 1900, or only about 15 per cent. of the entire number, were unemployed three months or over. This, to one who has opportunity for observation, seems preposterous. But little less unreasonable is the showing for painters.

As to bricklayers, the financial secretary of the Chicago Bricklayers' Union asserts that there is seldom a year in which the bricklayers of Chicago, if all were employed, could not do in six months all the work that is done in a year. The World's-Fair years are, of course, an exception. A reliable contracting mason states that the bricklayer who has eight months of work during the year is fortunate, and that stone masons average less time than bricklayers. This applies not to the present (exceptionally dull) times, but to such years as that of the last census.

Confirmation of these estimates is found in the census reports of manufactures, by which it appears that the average number of employees in this industry was 108,405; this would indicate about a two-thirds employment. But it must be taken into account that the number of employees returned includes laborers who do not appear in the tables of occupation as masons. For every ten masons there should be estimated no less than six laborers. This would make the average number of masons employed but 68,000. Assuming this number to have been employed half-time, this would be equivalent to 136,000 full time. As the entire number found by the enumerators was 158,918 it seems evident that the average employment of masons was rather under than over six months. Some allowance is probably necessary for inadequate enumeration in the manufacturing statistics.

Yet this report of nonemployment shows that but 68,355 out of a total of 158,918 were unemployed for so much as a month's time dur-

ing the year, and that but 40,531 lost more than three month's time. Except for such odd jobs as setting boilers and the like, masons' work is outside work ; they therefore do not work either in the rain, or when it is much below freezing. While there is less cold weather at the South, there is more rain, and when the sun is very hot the mason is compelled to lay off, or, as they say, "look for a black spot." With at least two months in the year in which it is impossible for masons to work, Colonel Wright asks us to believe that nearly 60 per cent. of the workers in this trade were employed eleven or more months during the census year. On page 667 of his article, Colonel Wright presents among others, the statistics of the unemployed in this occupation, and his calculation is that this nonemployment is equivalent to the nonemployment of 24,181 for twelve months. His table does not give the full number of employees, so that the absurdity of his figures is not at first glance apparent. The amount of nonemployment shown for this trade is but slightly over 15 per cent.

Col. Wright's statistics aim to demonstrate that wage workers have little cause of complaint as to nonemployment, and that an increased production of but 7 or 8 per cent. would keep every worker in manufacturing and mechanical industry fully employed.

Below is a summary from the *Illinois Labor Reports* of 1886, bearing on this point :

40,281 trade unionists	Average, 35.5 weeks	or 68	per cent. full time.
7,036 coal miners	" 23.4 "	or 48	" " " "
5,567 railroad men	" 46.1 "	or 88	" " " "
32,445 Knights of Labor	" 41.5 "	or 80	" " " "
85,329 workmen	" 37.1 "	or 71.3	" " " "

If [says the commissioner] it be considered necessary to make some allowance for any supposed disposition to exaggerate the case on the part of those who have stated it, or for error in judgment on the part of those stating it, the conclusion might be somewhat modified and still show the average working time to be 75 per cent.

This showing is principally, if not entirely, for organized labor. A showing for all classes of labor would probably be even less favorable.

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